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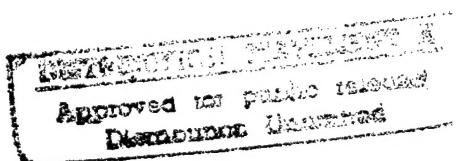
The Joint Task Force Commander Afloat:
Doctrinal Challenges

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.



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Abstract

Joint Task Forces are the new “weapon of choice” to tackle the tough national crises in the future. Often, the Joint Task Forces will be commanded from the sea, in mobile, offshore command posts. Furthermore, The U. S. Navy’s fleet of command ships are becoming increasingly interoperable in the joint arena. Current doctrine provides but a cursory sketch of the concept of Joint Task Force commanded from the sea. Doctrine needs a more full and explicit development to sufficiently address the tradeoffs inherent with command of a Joint Task Force from the sea. Doctrine should specifically address when it is appropriate to command from the sea, and when and how command should be shifted from an afloat to an ashore command post.

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The Joint Task Force Commander Afloat: Doctrinal Challenges

"Today war is unlikely, but peace is even more unlikely and therefore crisis will be the normal state of the world for many years to come."

-Col Gary Miller, USMC
Fleet Marine, C3F

I. Introduction:

The continued volatility of the world in general guarantees the future employment of the Armed Forces of the United States. In Joint Vision 2010, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has cautioned the United States to be ready to employ its armed forces in a wide range of contingencies. He expects the armed forces to be based primarily in the Continental United States (CONUS) and will deploy as necessary to engage crises throughout the world.¹

Future employment of the armed forces will probably not be a long protracted war, but will span the entire range of operations through military operations other than war to major regional conflicts. Joint doctrine allows for an establishing authority, such as the Secretary of Defense or a Unified Commander-in-Chief, to designate Joint Task Forces (JTF) to act in specific regional contingencies.² For example, Commander-in-Chief, U. S. Atlantic Command established a Joint Task Force to command the operations in Haiti, codenamed UPHOLD DEMOCRACY.³ The Commander of the JTF (CJTF) will of course be from any military service and

will command sea, air and land forces in a "seamless integration of Service capabilities"⁴.

Since US forces will largely be CONUS-based, the ability to rapidly project power from the United States is imperative.⁵ Since a significantly reduced overseas presence exists with fewer forces and headquarters in place in potential areas of crisis, the CJTF in many cases will not be able to assume an established headquarters. This is reinforced by the fact that the CJTF and staff will deploy from CONUS or from elsewhere in the theater to the area of operations. In many likely scenarios, the CJTF will probably choose to headquarter his staff ashore; however, the joint operations area (JOA) can frequently be unsuitable for an ashore headquarters for any number of reasons. Since in many scenarios naval forces will most likely be the first on station⁶, the commander may elect to headquarter his staff at sea. Recent significant operations such as Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY and Exercise RIM OF THE PACIFIC '96 illustrate the concept of JTF commanded from the sea. Doctrine does not yet fully address where or how a CJTF staff should be headquartered nor does it provide an adequate framework for the commander to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of the headquartering plan. Joint and service-specific doctrine must be developed in order to help the Joint Force Commander to effectively evaluate the headquartering plan for the CJTF staff. For each mission assigned, the Joint Force Commander must make the nontrivial determination of the location of the CJTF staff headquarters. This decision is crucial in that the way the

CJTF staff is headquartered and has a direct and significant impact of the operation of the Joint Task Force.

II. Basic Concepts of the Afloat Command Post:

Before the operational employment and joint doctrine requirements associated with commanding JTF's from the sea can be discussed, it is useful to first outline the types of afloat command platforms that are available to the CJTF and to emphasize the joint force orientation of the Navy's command ships. While some ship types are suited to support the command of large forces, their utility is limited when they are expected to be operated in support of an entire CJTF staff. Other ship types are uniquely designed to support a large staff and are well-suited to support a CJTF and his staff.

Large-deck "capital" ships such as aircraft carriers (CV/CVN) and amphibious assault ships (LHA/LHD) have a modest capability to support headquarters staffs. These ships are designed to serve as capable platforms to support a maritime component commander or the commander, Amphibious Task Force (CATF) within a JTF. However, the utility of these ships to support a larger CJTF staff that has a mission exceeding the traditional maritime task force mission is limited. These ships are equipped with limited berthing, C4I and workspaces to support large staffs. In order to support JTF command from the sea, more capable command platforms are required.

The US Navy operates four command ships as flagships (or headquarters vessels) for numbered fleet commanders and their staffs (see table below). Self-contained and highly mobile, command ships can serve as excellent afloat headquarters platforms for the CJTF. These ships are equipped with the necessary communications, intelligence and decision support equipment required to support joint operations. Command ships that have been developed from service-oriented amphibious command ships and administrative flagships are becoming truly joint-oriented command platforms. Command ships can be and are intended to be used to headquarter the CJTF and the staff.

USN Command Ships⁷

Ship	Homeport	Flagship for
USS MOUNT WHITNEY (LCC 20)	Norfolk, VA	SECOND FLEET
USS CORONADO (AGF 11)	San Diego, CA	THIRD FLEET
USS LA SALLE (AGF 3)	Gaeta, IT	SIXTH FLEET
USS BLUE RIDGE (LCC 19)	Yokosuka, JA	SEVENTH FLEET

Navy leadership has been actively pursuing the explicit designation of the Navy's command ships as "Joint Task Force Command Ships" assigning to them the hull type designation JCC.⁸ Redesignation of the Amphibious Command Ships (LCC's) and the Miscellaneous Command Ships (AGF's) as JCC's would emphasize their use as "afloat command centers, with all the inherent mobility and robust C4I

capability these command ships provide, to allow integrated command and control facilities for sea, air, and ground commanders in joint and combined operations.⁹ Not only are these ships particularly suited to support the command of JTF's, they will be specifically designated as joint assets.

III. Support Available to the CJTF Staff

Command ships are currently equipped with ample facilities to conduct joint operations. Future upgrades to the smaller command ships (AGF's) will include flag-level JTF situation rooms that will afford the commander sufficient space to conduct crisis and operational planning. Command ships also contain fully equipped joint Intelligence Centers (JIC) and Joint Operations Centers (JOC). The JFACC and AADC are fully supported through GCCS (Global Command and Control System)-centered C4I architecture and are fully compatible with all the military services. The CJTF personal and special staff groups, the directorate branches ("J-codes") must be fully accommodated,¹⁰ in terms of command, control, communications, computers and intelligence (C4I) as well as messing and berthing. Command ships are capable of providing that support.

A seamless CJTF staff organization is achieved through the interoperable C4I support provided by the command ship. In addition to the CJTF core staff, the Joint Force Air Component Commander (JFACC), the Area Air Defense Coordinator (AADC) and at least one other component commander, possibly the naval

component commander (NAVFOR), can be fully supported.¹¹ Although the entire staffs of the other component commanders may not be fully represented, planning and operations cells made up of liaison officers and key staff members of the other functional and service components can be sufficiently supported. In the future, the ground component commander can be more fully supported with the integration of JSTARS terminals aboard command ships.¹² Command ships are viable joint command and control platforms and in some instances may indeed be the command platform of choice.

IV. Operational Employment of the JTF Command Ship

Joint Task Forces headquartered at sea offer many unique advantages to the CJTF while concurrently containing significant limitations and challenges. Headquartered on a single vessel appropriately configured to support the CJTF, the commander is able to capitalize on the utility of the self-contained, self-sufficient and mobile command post. The afloat command post enhances unity of command for the CJTF and allows him to take advantage of certain principles of war and operational art. The CJTF can use an afloat command post to take advantage of time, economy of forces, and maneuver.

Unity of command is inherently enhanced by centrally locating the staff and major subordinate commands with the commander embarked on a JTF command ship. Rather than being distributed within the JOA, the CJTF staff can take

advantage of the close proximity of other embarked staffs and establish effective working relationships.

The command ship can support the "critical mass"¹³ of the CJTF staff allowing immediate deployment of the CJTF staff as a unit. Immediate deployment of the CJTF staff allows early crisis action planning, development of the JOPES (Joint Operational Planning and Execution System) and JFACC ATO (Air Tasking Order) process, and the seamless introduction of the JTF augmentees. Unlike an ashore CJTF staff, the staff can already be functioning in the movement phase of operations in a complete and fully functioning command post. The inevitable communications challenges can be resolved while in transit to the JOA. By having the command post already assembled and operating, the command structure is refined, and time is made available to resolve command and control inefficiencies and activate the staff battle rhythm.

The CJTF staff is normally expected to be located in the JOA.¹⁴ For crises occurring in the littoral, embarking the CJTF and staff on a command ship allows the CJTF staff to be positioned on scene while retaining freedom of movement. The inherent mobility of the afloat command post can be used to defeat the enemy's attempts to gain a positional advantage to attack and attempt to decapitate the JTF. During a major regional contingency, this advantage over enemy maneuver is indeed valuable. In Military Operations other than War (MOOTW), the threat to the headquarters staff may be harder to identify and defeat than in a regional

contingency. Additionally, traditional security measures (such as camouflage) may not be appropriate in certain MOOTW situations.¹⁵ Certainly, the command ship at sea is not invulnerable to attack, but by having the headquarters apparatus at sea, it becomes more difficult for an enemy to deliver an attack on the CJTF. While at sea, the JTF command ship operates under a protective umbrella already in place by the participating naval combatants. Placing the command ship under this umbrella with other mission essential units, such as the CV/CVN or LHA/LHD, takes clear advantage of economy of force.

The CJTF can capitalize on the many distinct advantages the command ship offers, however, he must be aware of the equally distinct disadvantages. The Navy currently operates only four command ships, and, as stated earlier, they are used as numbered fleet flagships. If the CJTF assigned is not a numbered fleet commander, or the fleet commander is not a part of the JTF and if the command ship cannot fully accommodate both staffs, then the fleet commander will need to shift his flag ashore or to another flagship. Additionally, the command ships, while maneuverable, are only lightly armed. Consequently, if there is a perceived threat to the command ship, operational protection by naval combatant escort in the form of surface ships, submarines and aircraft must be assigned to protect the ship as a mission essential unit. Normally, combatant escort is provided to other mission essential units, so while the NAVFOR must plan for operational protection of the command ship, he may be able to do so economically as described earlier. Command ships are also

equipped with a finite number of berths and may constrain the size of the CJTF staff.¹⁶

A further potential disadvantage that must be considered is the relatively slow speed of the afloat command post. During the time the command ship takes to transit to the JOA, the CJTF staff may be transported directly through airlift assets. However, the disadvantage of the extra time required for the afloat command post to arrive may be outweighed by taking advantage of the opportunity to get the staff battle rhythm established and starting on the crisis action planning. Additionally, presence of the staff in the JOA may not be immediately required, and a delay in arrival may be desirable.

V. Historical Cases:

The practice of exercising command of a JTF from the sea is not an entirely new concept. The Commander, U. S. SECOND Fleet was assigned to be the commander of JTF 120, Operation URGENT FURY, the Grenada operation of 1983¹⁷. While commander of a Joint Task Force, Commander SECOND Fleet/CJTF 120 was a naval officer and he used USS GUAM as his flagship; it was natural for him to use it as the JTF afloat command post. While arguably a less than successful operation, it does provide an example of command of joint forces commanding from ship at sea.

More recently (and in context significantly more interesting), JTF command from the sea was successfully accomplished during the operations in Haiti, code named UPHOLD DEMOCRACY. The truly joint nature of the operation and the joint capability of the command ship were highlighted. Here, a U.S. Army corps commander (XVIII Airborne Corps) was designated as CJTF 180, in charge of the overall operation and was embarked on the command ship USS MOUNT WHITNEY. Aboard the command ship with CJTF 180 was the naval and land component commanders as well as elements of the JSOTF (Joint Special Operations Task Force), USCG and other groups. The NAVFOR was Commander, SECOND Fleet, who is normally headquartered aboard MOUNT WHITNEY. The coexistence of two three-star staffs aboard the normal flagship of the naval component commander is an example of one of the tradeoffs made when headquartering the CJTF at sea.

Concurrently, the supporting Operation SUPPORT DEMOCRACY was commanded from an at-sea command post. The Commander, JTF 120 (Commander, Cruiser-Destroyer Group EIGHT), embarked on the assault ship USS WASP and reported directly to CJTF 180. While the mission of CJTF 120 was almost exclusively maritime, CJTF 180's mission was truly joint in nature and provides an remarkable example of a joint task force commanded from the sea.¹⁸

An additional example of JTF command from the sea in combined operations is Exercise RIMPAC '96 of May through July 1996. This major international exercise illustrated the capability for a Joint Command Ship to support combined operations in

both MOOTW and regional contingency. The Command Ship USS CORONADO, as the flagship for Commander, U. S. THIRD Fleet, provided command support for the commander of the combined joint task force that included operations in the littoral, using conventional and special forces in combat and in disaster relief. The exercise demonstrated the command ship's extensive capability to command multiple carrier battle groups, land and air forces as well as special forces in a joint and combined environment.¹⁹ The exercise highlighted the use of the Joint Command Ship and stressed the importance of the ability to command joint and combined forces in the littoral.

VI. The Need for doctrine:

As briefly discussed, joint doctrine does not sufficiently address the operational employment of CJTF's headquartered at sea. Joint Publication 3-00, Doctrine for Joint Operations, states that a Joint Force Commander can command from the sea and briefly alludes to the communications challenges that could be experienced when a CJTF command is shifted from the sea to the shore.²⁰ However, no explicit discussion in doctrine exists concerning when a CJTF should command from the sea nor does it discuss the factors that need to be considered when determining if the Joint Task Force should be commanded from the sea. Joint and service-specific doctrine should address at a minimum when it is appropriate to

headquarter the staff at sea, when the CJTF command should be shifted ashore, and the challenges associated with command of a CJTF from the sea.

VII. A. Doctrine: Why headquarter afloat

In many areas of potential conflict, standing staffs that can serve as JTF's exist with the appropriate amount of support already in place. Other areas are suitable for the establishment of the CJTF headquarters ashore within the JOA. However, in certain circumstances, the JFC may find it necessary to base his staff afloat. Since the command ship is constrained to navigable waters, the use of a command ship to headquarter a CJTF staff makes sense primarily in the littoral. Possible scenarios favorable to basing the headquarters at sea range from conventional conflict to MOOTW. Circumstances that may require basing the staff afloat during conflict include:

- When the ashore command post has been overwhelmed by the enemy, and the staff was forced to evacuate. A possible Korean Peninsula scenario could make the use of a command ship essential in the efforts to retake the peninsula. An illustrative example is the simple photograph in Joint Publication 1 of General MacArthur observing the landing at Inchon aboard the command ship USS MOUNT MCKINLEY (AGC 7).²¹

- Where the CJTF is conducting opposed operations in an immature theater.

Some areas in Southeast Asia, such as the contested Spratly Islands serve as a sobering example.

- Where the CJTF operations are hampered by an inadequacy of host nation or coalition support.

Similarly, the CJTF staff may be based at sea during MOOTW. Although some MOOTW operations do not require large command facilities, the use of JCC's or other afloat command posts could significantly enhance the efficiency and operational protection of the CJTF headquarters. Afloat command posts could be used during MOOTW when:

- Conducting Military Support to Civil Authority (MSCA) where there is an acute lack of logistic support ashore, such as in a natural disaster.

- Host nation support is unobtainable, such as may be encountered in a noncombatant evacuation operation, such as the recent operations in Liberia. Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY is also a relevant example.

- the political sensitivities require that only a small presence in country is appropriate.

VIII. Doctrine: Why and how to shift ashore

Once the CJTF is established on the command ship, he can continue to command the JTF indefinitely from the sea. Circumstances may require the CJTF to decide to shift his command ashore. Joint Publication 3-00 seems to imply that this is always necessary when the operation proceeds landward,²² and certainly there are circumstances when he should. The most clear reason for shifting command to an ashore command post is when the size of the staff exceeds the command ship's capability to support. Once facilities are assembled ashore, the commander may shift his flag ashore. Joint Publication 3-00 discusses shifting the command ashore in stages, or to shift components ashore as a satellite headquarters.²³

If conditions dictate that part of the JTF command structure shift command ashore, then the most seamless method would be to have the CJTF and staff remain embarked in the command ship and shift certain functional components ashore. The most sensible is the land component commander and the JFACC. As the operation progresses, the land component commander can move ashore, and, once the preponderance of the air assets belong to the Air Force, and sufficient facilities for the JFACC are established ashore, it is reasonable to shift the JFACC ashore.²⁴ Current doctrinal discussion assumes the Joint Force Commander will always shift the flag ashore, but this need not be the case in all circumstances.

Perhaps the least disruptive approach is to not shift the CJTF command ashore at all. Although the land component commander may well be ashore, it may not always be necessary nor desirable for the CJTF to shift command ashore. Identical C4I equipment and other support facilities need to be duplicated in the JOA prior to shifting the CJTF ashore. This may be neither practical nor desirable. If the staff has already been established aboard the command ship, then shifting the CJTF headquarters will tend to needlessly fracture the staff beyond what is necessary and sacrifice the established staff battle rhythm. Little may be gained by going ashore, except to accommodate a larger staff. If the command post needs to be accessible from the land, then the command ship could possibly be moored pierside, preserving some of the benefits of the command ship. If there must be some portion of the staff disembarked from the command ship, then, in accordance with Joint Publication 3-00, shifting functional components is the best next step.²⁵

IX. Conclusion:

Current Joint Doctrine touches on the possibility that the commander of a Joint Task Force may command from the sea. Several historical examples of JTF command afloat are illustrative of this concept. The Navy is working to provide fully functional and interoperable joint afloat command platforms to fill this role. However, joint and service-specific doctrine beyond the simplistic acknowledgment of command afloat is sorely lacking. As a start, doctrine that addresses when a JTF

commander should establish the command post at sea, and when and how it should be shifted to a shore command post should be developed. The most logical doctrinal publication in which to inject this more developed doctrine is in the Joint Publication 5-00.2, Procedures for Forming and Operating a Joint Task Force. Doctrine must be more thoroughly developed so that any staff designated as a CJTF can adequately weigh the utility of command from the sea.

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